

Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission Report

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www.fishandboat.com



All Politics is Local

Many of you have heard the phrase “All politics is local.” It’s often associated with the late Thomas “Tip” O’Neill, former Speaker of the United States House of Representatives. The thinking behind the phrase is that political success comes from keenly understanding the issues that impact constituents at their local level – from the condition of roads and bridges that they drive every day, to property tax challenges facing schools, to the value recreational sports like fishing have in connecting families and kids to their communities.

Success comes to politicians who understand this, either by their own doing or when constituents speak out in such numbers that the issues can’t be ignored. The savvy politician listens and acts accordingly.

Pennsylvania has a rich fishing history. But with fewer of the Commonwealth’s 253 legislators participating in the sport, I fear that our local issues aren’t fully understood in the halls of the Capitol.

I urge you, as anglers, boaters and conservationists, to join the growing list of vocal supporters who have contacted their local representative and senator in support of a license fee increase for the Fish and Boat Commission. We need your help to make sure our elected officials fully understand the impact recreational fishing has on our communities and take the appropriate steps to make sure our grandkids can enjoy the same experiences.

As I’ve been sharing with you for the last several years, fiscal year 2017-18 will be a pivotal year for the agency. This is the year when expenditures are projected to begin exceeding revenues, despite my

efforts over the last eight years as director to contain costs.

Until 2017, the Commission was able to balance its budget and not spend more than it earned. This fiscal management approach has allowed it to build a rainy-day fund of uncommitted reserves to prepare for and meet foreseen rising pension and health care costs.

The agency proudly leads the nation in how efficiently it operates. The Legislative Budget and Finance Committee found in 2014 that “of the states for which we have expenditure information, Pennsylvania’s PFBC has the lowest expenditures per license.” If that same analysis was done today, it would show that the return on investment for the purchase of a fishing license is even far better than it was in 2014.

A total of 860,000 fishing licenses were sold in 2013 which resulted in \$19.8 million in revenue. Last year 845,000 licenses were sold, resulting in \$19.2 million in revenue. That is a 1.66 percent drop in sales. During the same period, the Commission



John Arway with Johnny Morris, owner of BassPro Shops and Cabelas, at the North American Wildlife Conference sponsored by the Wildlife Management Institute.

experienced a 6.2 percent increase in expenses, with little to no change in the amount of goods produced or level of services provided. This is quite a remarkable feat for either a business or a government agency.

So how did we do it? To meet the escalating costs of employee pensions, health care and general inflation faced by all Commonwealth agencies, the Commission has cut

spending in large part by reducing staff from a high of 432 to around 366. At the same time, the value of a fishing license adjusted for inflation has dropped to about \$16.25, while fish production costs have climbed dramatically. The true cost of today’s fishing license adjusted for inflation would be \$37.18. At \$22.90, today’s license value is a real bargain for Pennsylvania anglers.

Additional annual personnel and operating costs of \$6.2 million have caused expenditures to now exceed annual revenues. Absent a revenue increase, the agency will be forced this fiscal year to begin using an uncommitted reserve fund balance of about \$60 million to cover essential health care and pension obligations and maintain operations and services. This will significantly deplete the reserve fund within five years if revenues do not increase. In addition, we must begin to make \$2 million in cuts authorized by the Board of Commissioners last September.

The current plan for achieving the \$2 million reduction in operating costs would involve closing two warmwater hatcheries and one trout hatchery in fiscal year 2018-19, which begins July 1. The plan would reduce the number of trout stocked in 2019 by 7.5 percent (approximately 220,000 trout) and result in severe reductions in staff support to the Cooperative Nursery Program.

Pennsylvania anglers significantly contribute \$1.2 billion to the \$46 billion in national fishing-related expenditures. For the past eight years as executive director, I have reported to you about the agency’s position on the Fiscal Slope. I have warned that the fiscal slope would lead to a fiscal cliff.

Today we stand at the edge of the cliff and need to make a binary decision. Either act on a revenue increase which will provide security for the future, or



begin the free fall off the cliff because of the spending cuts that we need to make.

The majority of anglers, boaters and conservationists from across the Commonwealth continue to speak out in support of a license increase. Articles have appeared in approximately 30 newspapers across the Commonwealth echoing this support. Editorial Boards of three major Common-

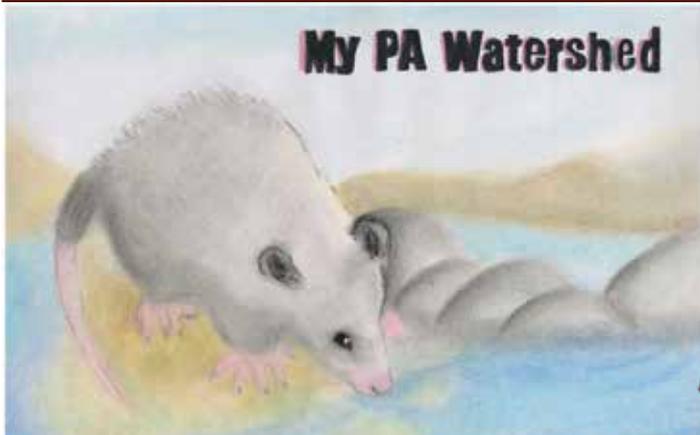
wealth newspapers also independently share these public views.

Previous legislatures have increased fishing license fees 13 times over the last 99 years. They recognized the importance of approving funding of the Commission. The time has come to recognize that we have arrived at the same point in history where we need to deal with the same deci-

sion as our predecessors.

All politics is local. Step up. Speak out. Join others from your local communities and share with your representative and senator the importance and value of recreational fishing. With your vocal support, I am confident that our legislators will vote to meet the expectations of Pennsylvania anglers. **PFBC**

**2018 Senior Photo Contest
2nd Place Winner
"My PA Watershed"
Courtney Fox, Potter County**



My watershed depicts a Virginia Opossum drinking out of the Genesee River. The Genesee River flows north into Lake Ontario, the St. Lawrence Seaway, and the Gulf Of Mexico, where it connects with The Atlantic Ocean. It is part of the only triple divide east of the Mississippi River, along with the Allegheny River and Pine Creek Susquehanna. Opossums or "possums" are marsupials that are (usually) nocturnal and burrow underground. They usually prefer to live in areas such as the forest, or wet marsh-like type habitats. Possums are omnivores who eat nearly anything, i.e. fruits, nuts, garbage, small animals, fish, and even crayfish. Courtney Fox



**2018 Junior Photo Contest
2nd Place Winner
"My PA Watershed"
Patrick Lehman, Potter County**



My poster shows a white-tail deer taking a drink from the Genesee River. The Genesee River is one of 3 watersheds in Potter County. It flows to Lake Ontario, then it flows through the St. Lawrence River, and then to the Atlantic Ocean. Patrick Lehman

**2018 Sub-Junior Photo Contest
2nd Place Winner
"My PA Watershed"
Evelyn Warner, Cambria County**

In my picture, there are many animals that are using the resources from this stream. My owl is enjoying a tasty salmon for lunch. My turtle is taking a nice, refreshing drink from the sparkling stream. The duck and her ducklings are taking a relaxing swim. The frog is looking around for his lunch. The fish are looking for food and a place to stay. This PA Watershed provides all of this for all these animals. Evelyn Warner

